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Security Council

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Wednesday, 17 June 2009, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. İlkin	(Turkey)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Vilović
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Uganda	Mr. Mugoya
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Parham
	United States of America	Ms. DiCarlo
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2009/300)

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09-37195 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2009/300)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Serbia, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Vuk Jeremić (Serbia) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: On behalf of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the course of the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lamberto Zannier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Zannier to take a seat at the Council table.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Skender Hyseni.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Hyseni to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations. Members of the Council have before them document S/2009/300, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing from Mr. Lamberto Zannier. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Zannier: The report (S/2009/300) members of the Security Council have before them today details the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) during the period from 10 March to 31 May 2009.

With the conclusion of UNMIK's three phases of reconfiguration, following the report (S/2008/354) of the Secretary-General of 12 June 2008, UNMIK has progressively shifted its focus towards an increasingly diplomatic and political role focused on facilitating dialogue and external relations and fostering minority rights. As set out in the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/692) of 24 November 2008, which was welcomed by the Council in a presidential statement (S/PRST/2008/44), UNMIK's reconfiguration is both timely and necessary. Moreover, it has served to enhance UNMIK's effectiveness, in view of the prevailing circumstances on the ground, which have increasingly limited the scope for performing administrative functions. The reconfiguration took place in a transparent manner vis-à-vis all stakeholders. It was also consonant with the United Nations position of strict neutrality on the question of Kosovo's status.

Under the guidance of the Secretariat, UNMIK has adhered strictly to the guidelines that provided for reductions in its budget, which took into account the role of other actors on the ground and the valuable synergies of the joint international effort. UNMIK's role today is different, but no less relevant or vital. The newly reconfigured UNMIK will continue to perform its functions under resolution 1244 (1999), with the overall aim of ensuring peace and stability in Kosovo.

UNMIK's proposed budget for the upcoming 2009-2010 budget cycle amounts to $47,082,000 and provides for 507 staff members. This reflects the new

role taken on by the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) in that field, as well as the continuing role of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in monitoring respect for human and minority rights through their extensive field presence. UNMIK's resources and skills, combined with those of the other organizations, provide the full panoply of expertise and staff needed to implement our mandate while promoting synergies and avoiding duplication of efforts.

The United Nations remains uniquely situated to play a useful role for both sides, inter alia by facilitating the resolution of problems as an intermediary between parties that are not ready to deal with each other directly. This may involve mediating between the communities or facilitating Kosovo's engagement in external affairs, which is key to ensuring the functionality of such regional processes as, for instance, the Central European Free Trade Agreement. Our status of neutrality allows us to use our efforts to nurture the reconciliation of Kosovo's communities and foster regional cooperation, for the benefit of all of Kosovo's people and for the stability and development of the region as a whole.

Regrettably, our ability to promote status-neutral solutions to practical issues is being affected by the positions taken by the parties in anticipation of the issuance of the advisory opinion requested by the General Assembly from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Kosovo's declaration of independence. Whether justified or not, Belgrade and Pristina have been viewing every action they or we take through the prism of how it may be perceived or interpreted by the ICJ as potentially either weakening or strengthening the case of one side or the other.

In spite of those difficulties, UNMIK continues to engage with the various stakeholders on matters affecting the lives of all of Kosovo's communities, as a facilitator of a process in which opportunities exist for the sides to engage and resolve differences. While efforts to address specific problems tend to be perceived by one side or the other as a potential threat to its perceived interests, making it often very difficult to move the process forward, we have found that engagement at the technical level, such as in the cultural heritage or in the missing persons areas, is constructive and produces results. We therefore urge both Belgrade and Pristina to find more ways to engage at the technical level to deliver what both clearly advocate, which is a better life for all the people of Kosovo.

In that regard, the period covered by this latest report has been marked by some tangible progress in a number of areas. One such has been progress in finding a solution for the decade-old problem of electricity supply to the Kosovo Serb community south of the Ibar River. After a decade of refusing to pay for the electricity they consume, for political reasons, and following targeted blackouts by the electricity provider, the engagement of the international community, including that of UNMIK where and when warranted, and the support of senior representatives of Serbia's Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija, have resulted in at least 98 per cent of the Kosovo Serb enclaves agreeing to a payment scheme, which has resulted in their receiving a regular supply of electricity.

During this period a crisis was also averted north of the Ibar River, where attempts by Kosovo Albanian displaced persons, backed by the Kosovo authorities, to rebuild a number of houses in the northern Mitrovica suburb of Kroi i Vitakut/Brdjani, met with opposition from the Kosovo Serb community, which held daily protests. With UNMIK's active engagement, an agreement was reached in principle between the communities, to the effect that Kosovo Serbs would be allowed to build homes on newly acquired land in the same area without opposition from Kosovo Albanians. While the issue of reconstruction is inherently linked to the right of return, the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities still perceive matters in more political and strategic terms, and the situation remains fragile.

Another step forward during this period, on a technical issue of importance for the peaceful coexistence of Kosovo's communities, occurred in the area of protecting the Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo. UNMIK is engaged in strategic cooperation in that area with other actors, such as the Council of Europe. In coordination with other key stakeholders, UNMIK finally succeeded in overcoming a year-long stalemate, and last month was able to reactivate the Reconstruction Implementation Commission, which deals with rebuilding Serbian Orthodox Church sites. The reconstruction of cultural patrimony is one of the few areas in which representatives of Belgrade and of Pristina interact directly at the technical level.

Another such area is that of missing persons, where Pristina and Belgrade continue to meet, putting status-related concerns aside. The Pristina and Belgrade delegations of the Working Group on Missing Persons met on 3 June at an open session in Belgrade. Both delegations provided information on potential sites that could contain the remains of people considered missing and pledged to do more to address the problem of missing persons. The Working Group agreed that the positive momentum achieved must be continued and developed further, but here too much remains to be done, and it is key that the issue remain non-politicized.

Further positive steps have been taken over the past few weeks towards restoring the effectiveness of the Kosovo Property Agency (KPA). As members may recall, following the entry into force of the Kosovo constitution, KPA offices in Serbia that had facilitated the collection of claims, the gathering and verifying of information and the delivery of decisions were closed, thus hampering the process leading to the final adjudication of a significant number of claims. A solution has recently been agreed upon by all stakeholders to request that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provide for an arrangement that would allow for the operation of KPA offices in Serbia under the umbrella of the United Nations. Such a solution would allow for the constructive engagement of Pristina and Belgrade to ensure restitution of the property rights of internally displaced persons within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999). I have therefore asked UNHCR to consider entering into such an arrangement, and I take this opportunity to acknowledge the continued cooperation of UNHCR and its valuable contributions in ensuring the protection of the rights of the displaced communities of Kosovo.

The number of voluntary returns remains disappointingly low and, despite repeated calls by the Kosovo authorities for Serbs to return to Kosovo and reclaim their homes, the response has been negligible. To their credit, the Kosovo authorities, supported by the international community, are making efforts to ensure that the conditions exist for sustainable returns.

Throughout the reporting period, UNMIK has been cooperating closely with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). EULEX continues to operate throughout Kosovo under the overall authority of the United Nations and within the status-neutral framework of resolution 1244 (1999). As noted in the annex to the Secretary-General's report, EULEX declared itself to be at full operational capability on 6 April and now has a staff of 2,569. EULEX is engaged in monitoring, mentoring and advising Kosovo's rule of law institutions and exercises certain executive functions. EULEX has also engaged in discussions with the Government of Serbia, including meetings in Belgrade with the Serbian Deputy Prime Minister/Minister for the Interior, and the Ministers for Kosovo and Metohija for Finance and Justice. UNMIK has remained fully involved in these consultations.

With the process of reconfiguring UNMIK nearly completed, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) continues to carry out its mandated responsibility for comprehensive monitoring throughout Kosovo through its extensive field presence. Timely OSCE reporting earlier this year on the disputed reconstruction of Kosovo Albanian houses north of the Ibar river and on the electricity cuts in Serbian enclaves south of the river are just two examples of how OSCE fulfils this important role. With its main focus on ensuring that the human rights of Kosovo's diverse ethnic communities are protected, OSCE is well-placed to play an even greater role as a mediator in disputes between the communities, a role I have strongly encouraged it to play, as it builds the capacities of local institutions and fosters democratic principles and practices.

I assumed the duties of Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of Mission a year ago. It has been a year of intense activities, and with the cooperation of all, we managed to ensure that the delicate phase of transition did not produce instability or crisis. However, as I have outlined, much remains to be done, and this means that we will need to continue to work towards the resolution of the remaining issues. Looking ahead, the reconfiguration of UNMIK also presents us with an opportunity to enhance cooperation between the various United Nations actors operating in Kosovo, improving the overall coherence and effectiveness of United Nations action and promoting greater interaction in pursuit of our shared objectives.

A founding purpose of the United Nations is to harmonize the actions of nations in the attainment of peace and the resolution of economic, social, cultural or humanitarian problems and to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. This goal has

been foremost in our minds during these past three months, while we completed the reconfiguration of UNMIK. Our goal, with the support of EULEX, OSCE and the international military presence, remains to ensure stability, foster reconciliation and allow for the return of internally displaced persons. I am confident that the reconfigured Mission, enhanced by the significant OSCE field presence and by the EULEX police and justice components, represents a well-honed tool for performing these functions on behalf of the Council and the Secretary-General. My staff and I hope we can continue to count on the support of the Council.

The President: I thank Mr. Zannier for his briefing. I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić.

Mr. Jeremić (Serbia): Thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting of the Security Council.

Once again, we are gathered to discuss the dangerous consequences of the 17 February 2008 unilateral declaration of independence by the ethnic Albanian authorities of Serbia's southern province of Kosovo and Metohija.

I welcome the presence of Special Representative Lamberto Zannier, and I wish to underline the Secretary-General's observation, contained in his most recent report, that the cooperation, constructive engagement and "continuing support of the Security Council and of the broader international community for a reconfigured UNMIK is of crucial importance" (S/2009/300, para. 44).

Reconfiguration has been brought to its end-state, as the report indicates. Therefore, no further reduction in the resources of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) should be undertaken.

The United Nations remains the overall authority in Kosovo, as mandated by this Council in resolution 1244 (1999). It must continue to play a vital role in coordinating all the international organizations that operate under its umbrella. The capacity of UNMIK to cooperate effectively with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) in particular must not be constrained. Our amendments to the UNMIK budget for the coming fiscal year have sought to reinforce that essential element of its mandate.

At the very beginning of my remarks, I would like to express my country's deep gratitude to the vast majority of Member States, which respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia. The solidarity we have received from all over the globe encourages us to persevere in our efforts to resolve the future status of Kosovo in a way that is acceptable to all responsible stakeholders. It is my sincere hope that we will continue to work together in defence of the basic principles of international law, thus strengthening the universal case for the consensual resolution of disputes throughout the world.

At the same time, we note with deep regret the dismissal of resolution 1244 (1999) by Pristina. As the Secretary-General's report makes plain, the ethnic Albanian authorities in Kosovo asserted that "they had no legal obligation to abide by it" (ibid., para. 2).

No one should be permitted to ignore the decisions of the Security Council. I therefore urge the Council to insist that all parties uphold the commitments that arise from resolution 1244 (1999). It was passed under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which binds all to respect its provisions in full. This is our common legal imperative and our moral obligation.

Serbia will never, under any circumstances, implicitly or explicitly recognize the unilateral declaration of independence by the ethnic Albanian authorities of our southern province. On this issue, we will not yield, come what may. We will continue to defend our integrity in a non-confrontational manner, using all peaceful means at our disposal.

As a result of our measured response to the unilateral declaration of independence, the unstable equilibrium on the ground has largely been kept in check. We have sought to contain flashpoints despite numerous provocations, such as the targeted power cuts, pressure to sign loyalty oaths and the construction of new, unauthorized housing settlements.

Kosovo should not stand outside the rules of the international system. It is no exception, not a unique case, nor is it sui generis. As a result of the unilateral declaration of independence, that declaration has become a test of global significance. Should it be allowed to stand, a door would open for challenging the territorial integrity of any United Nations Member State.

On 8 October 2008, the General Assembly approved, by an overwhelming margin, resolution 63/3 to refer the unilateral declaration of independence issue to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The judicial proceeding has begun, and it marks the first time that the ICJ has been asked to consider the legality of a unilateral attempt by an ethnic minority to secede from a United Nations Member State, in defiance of that State's democratic constitution and the will of the Security Council.

The case has attracted attention across the globe, as the active presence at the Court of representatives of countries from all continents to participate in the unilateral declaration of independence hearings makes clear. The ICJ conclusions will have far-reaching consequences for the international system as a whole. It is therefore vitally important that the legal process be allowed to run its course, free of political interference.

We should all respect the fact that the Court is deliberating on the issue. Therefore, new recognitions of the unilateral declaration of independence should not be encouraged, and multilateral bodies should refrain from extending membership to the secessionist authorities in Pristina. Once the ICJ hands down its opinion, we will have cause to look again into the issue, informed by the findings of the Court.

In the meantime, we should find the strength to put our differences on status to one side for the sake of peace and stability and for the residents of the province. This is a time for leadership and working together, armed with prudence and strategic vision. Let us not increase the divide. Some countries have recognized the unilateral declaration of independence. Others have not. We all have our constraints, and they should be respected. Let the Court do its work, while we focus on improving the lives of citizens instead of making them the victims of our disagreements.

Let us engage with each other so as to rebuild holy sites, alleviate poverty, create jobs, provide health care and education, reduce crime and improve public security. Working at cross purposes should stop. Let us create new opportunities for achieving practical results by engaging with one another on a whole host of questions.

I propose that we begin with the central humanitarian issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs). According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 200,000 Kosovo Serb IDPs have not returned to the province. Last year, only around 500 returned; and, during the latest reporting period, no more than 30. That is a failure of monumental proportions. Kosovo Serb IDPs want to exercise their right of return, and we must do everything to bring them back home. That means improving conditions on the ground to make them feel safe. Few destroyed houses have been rebuilt, and most remain empty. That is not, however, where the biggest problem lies. More than 40,000 claims have been filed by Kosovo Serb IDPs for the return of illegally seized private property, and they have not had any response. The first step, therefore, is to make sure that those claims are delivered. Right now, that is impossible. Sadly, the UNMIK-administered Kosovo Property Agency has ceased to exist.

We urge the international community to embrace the initiative of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to get UNHCR to take over the functions previously performed by the Kosovo Property Agency. Through its Office in Belgrade and others in Serbia that United Nations agency can serve as a focal point of our engagement.

On 6 April, the European Union announced that EULEX had reached full operational capacity, following the visit to Belgrade by the head of EULEX, Mr. Yves de Kermabon. While the United Nations has not transferred all rule of law functions to the European Law and Order Mission in Kosovo, it has adhered to the assumption by EULEX of operational responsibility within the parameters set out in the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/692). That report affirms that EULEX will fully respect resolution 1244 (1999) and operate under the overall authority and within the status-neutral framework of the United Nations.

Since that time, the Republic of Serbia has engaged with EULEX and UNMIK on a whole host of practical issues of common concern within the parameters welcomed by the Security Council. The Secretary-General's six-point arrangement (S/2008/354, annex I) must be applied in full. Some progress in that direction has been achieved, although "comprehensive or long-term solutions have not yet been agreed" (S/2008/300, para. 43).

We deeply regret that more has not been accomplished to date. That is due in part to the

reluctance of Pristina to accept that the infamous Ahtisaari Plan was not endorsed by the Security Council, thanks, in large part, to the principled position of the Russian Federation.

I turn to a brief discussion of the six points and related practical issues. Regarding the police, the question of senior positions for qualified Kosovo Serbs has not yet been resolved. That has left hundreds of ethnic Serb officers in the province feeling that they would return to a hostile work environment. At the same time, EULEX police and the Serbian Ministry of the Interior have begun to work successfully together in addressing a number of technical matters related to cooperation across the administrative line. Those include organized crime and smuggling and build upon the best practices of our long-standing cooperation with UNMIK police on those matters.

On the courts, some progress has occurred. Unfortunately, some of the broader issues have not yet been resolved, including the appointment of local judges and prosecutors in accordance with procedures consistent with resolution 1244 (1999). The question of the territorial jurisdiction of the northern Mitrovica courthouse remains unanswered, as does the applicability of UNMIK law only. On the other hand, partial progress has been achieved. Urgent cases are being processed. Some trials have been concluded, and cooperation between EULEX prosecutors and Serbia's Office of the War Crimes Prosecutor has been established.

On customs, preliminary meetings have taken place, resulting in certain technical progress on that delicate matter. Resolving it will require enhanced coordination and a renewed dedication to work together on achieving acceptable operating modalities, such as co-location and the distribution of revenues.

That brings me to the Central European Free-Trade Agreement, CEFTA. The success of that important regional trade agreement depends on the consistent application of unanimously agreed rules. UNMIK is a signatory to CEFTA, as the report plainly states. The introduction of new customs stamps by the so-called Kosovo Customs Director-General has regretfully politicized that commercial issue.

We very much hope that, in the months ahead, we will be able to arrive at a set of practical arrangements acceptable to responsible stakeholders. It is clear that a more active role by EULEX, consistent with its mandate, will be required, as will closer coordination with UNMIK.

I would like to draw the attention of the Security Council to a critically important issue, namely facilitating the entry of Serbian officials into the province. That question has, unfortunately, been accumulating ill will for several months and threatens to derail constructive efforts on all other fronts. It is difficult to imagine how we can positively contribute to developments on the ground if our ability to work closely with the Kosovo Serb community throughout the province is hindered. Serbian officials must be able to visit churches and monasteries, assist in the return of IDPs to reconstructed homes, provide food and medical aid, help maintain educational standards and engage on a whole host of other similar activities.

The assignment of operational responsibility to EULEX was welcomed on the presupposition that EULEX would make use of its executive functions when required. Now is such a time. We demand that all necessary measures be taken to swiftly resolve this issue of paramount importance.

Before coming to the end of my remarks, I would like to acknowledge the useful role played by the International Security Force in Kosovo (KFOR) in Kosovo. It had the responsibility to protect our enclaves and holy sites from potential threats, incursions and attacks. KFOR's status-neutral presence in the province is still required in order to satisfy the legitimate security needs of the local population, irrespective of ethnicity. We believe that, under the present circumstances, a troop reduction would be counter-productive.

We will continue to be a reliable partner of KFOR, in accordance with resolution 1244 (1999) and the Kumanovo Military Technical Agreement. The so-called Kosovo Security Force is an illegal paramilitary organization. Its existence and activities, present and future, constitute a direct danger to the consolidation of peace and stability in the Western Balkans and it must be disbanded immediately.

Serbia's democracy is secure, our society has grown strong and our values are safely entrenched in law. We strongly believe in the shared destiny of all European nations. We have demonstrated time and again, through concrete deeds and under difficult circumstances, our determination to become a member of the European Union. This remains our central

strategic priority. We therefore welcome the conclusions reached on 15 June by the EU Foreign Ministers. The decision to commit to placing the Western Balkans States on the white Schengen List rescinds at last the final vestiges of the 1990s.

The Security Council must continue to play a key role in the Kosovo dispute. We believe it would be beneficial for the Council to visit Serbia: Belgrade, Pristina, North Kosovo and the enclaves in order to see first-hand how much work still needs to be done on the ground, within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999). The only conclusion that I believe could be drawn is that coming to an agreement is the way forward. Regretfully, this has not yet been attempted.

A world leader said:

> "All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort — a sustained effort — to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children and, ... choose the right path, not just the easy path."

Taking the right path will not be easy. Unfortunately, there are those who are not yet ready to begin the journey towards compromise. But we must not be discouraged. We must cease pushing each other apart. We must find that common ground. The Republic of Serbia has taken the first step. The next one, we cannot take alone. We wait patiently for a partner to join us in turning away from the painful past and towards a hopeful future.

The President: I thank Minister Jeremić for his statement. I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Skender Hyseni.

Mr. Hyseni: Thank you so much for the opportunity to brief you, honourable members of the Council, on the continued accomplishments and steady progress the Republic of Kosovo has been making in all areas, with a special focus on the achievements made since my last statement to the Council in March.

The day before yesterday, we celebrated the first anniversary of the entry into force of our Constitution — the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. The new democratic Constitution of my country is a modern foundational document that incorporates all of the minority rights protections from the Ahtisaari comprehensive plan. The leaders and the people of Kosovo were, in fact, very honoured the day before yesterday, to welcome the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Martti Ahtisaari, in Pristina, to celebrate the first anniversary of the entry into force of our Constitution together.

The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has been reconfigured, and the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) achieved full operational capability on 6 April. Successful deployment of EULEX throughout Kosovo has been widely appreciated, and the Government of Kosovo has been cooperating closely on all issues. Improvement of the situation in North Kosovo after deployment of EULEX is obvious. Still, there is a lot that needs to be done. Otherwise, the overall security situation in the Republic of Kosovo is very calm and stable.

As I said in my remarks in this forum in March, for practical and pragmatic reasons we have requested the conclusion of the mission and mandate of UNMIK. In light of the continued positive developments in Kosovo and the widespread deployment of EULEX, I reiterate that request today. I also reiterate the commitment expressed in our Declaration of Independence and in our Constitution to respect adherence to international law, including binding resolutions of this body. That commitment has never wavered.

As the Government of Kosovo has assumed full responsibility over the organization of elections — that means over the Central Elections Commission as well — the new Central Elections Commission chairperson has been recently appointed. New elections for municipalities of Kosovo are expected to take place late this autumn. After lengthy consultations with political parties, His Excellency Dr. Fatmir Sejdiu, President of the Republic, has announced 15 November as the date of the new municipal elections.

Another very important institution has been recently established. After adoption of the law on the Constitutional Court, the Parliament of the Republic has also elected the members of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo.

State institution-building has also continued, based on European standards. The build-up of our security force is progressing. As I said in my March statement to the Council, the NATO-trained Kosovo Security Force is a democratic and civilian-controlled

security force. This multi-ethnic and apolitical force will be focused primarily on emergency response and generally on activities to promote development, regional peace, security and stability.

In line with the request for an advisory opinion submitted to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by the United Nations General Assembly on the question of the declaration of independence, the Republic of Kosovo, in compliance with the set deadlines, has submitted to the Court its written contribution on 17 April. I have also informed the Court of our intention to participate in all subsequent proceedings, including in the hearings due to open on 1 December 2009. The Court has already been notified of Kosovo's intention to present an oral contribution.

As we continue to take an active part in presenting our case before the ICJ, I wish to emphasize our commitment to justice and our trust in justice, and with that, our trust in ICJ justice. We are therefore confident that the ICJ's deliberations and ruling will be fair and impartial. We strongly believe that our position will be confirmed.

Recognition of Kosovo as an independent and sovereign State has continued. Continued recognitions are a clear testimony of progress and stability in Kosovo. Free nations of the world continue to appreciate Kosovo's contribution to regional peace and safety.

I wish once again to extend our profound thanks and appreciation to the peoples and Governments of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Republic of the Gambia and the Union of the Comoros for their recent recognition of the independence of my country. We urge all the other nations of the world to support the efforts of the people of Kosovo to build their future as a free and independent country. After having endured decades of unspeakable occupation, terror and slavery, the people of Kosovo deserve to be free and to join the community of the free and democratic nations of the world.

It is with great pleasure that I can speak today about Kosovo's membership in two international financial institutions of special weight and importance to my country, namely the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. On 6 May 2009, the IMF Board of Governors approved Kosovo's application, with 138 member States participating in the voting process, 96 of which approved the decision. It is very encouraging to note that 41 countries that have not yet recognized Kosovo voted in favour of Kosovo's membership.

On 3 June, the voting process for Kosovo's World Bank membership ended with 139 member States participating in the voting and 95 countries approving Kosovo's application. The formal accession to both the IMF and the World Bank will take place on 29 June in Washington, D.C., when the Republic of Kosovo signs both Articles of Agreement.

Membership in these two very important financial institutions is an additional encouragement to the Government of Kosovo to continue its efforts to fight crime and corruption, strengthen the rule of law and maintain macroeconomic stability through fiscal and budgetary discipline during the current economic downturn.

The Government of the Republic of Kosovo has been working very hard on the issues of the economy, justice and security and safety for all of its citizens. Integration of minorities and returnees has continued to be a standing priority of my Government. Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi has been personally reaching out to returning Serb families, and Government funds have been allocated for reconstruction of houses for returnees. Our Government has continued to seek ways to improve the conditions in the minority community areas, especially in the Serb majority areas.

Unfortunately, the Republic of Serbia has continued to prevent the Serb citizens of Kosovo from cooperating with the institutions of Kosovo. Belgrade has also continued to impede our cooperation with neighbours and the international community by blocking our participation in regional and wider international bodies.

Before concluding, I would like to re-emphasize that in the new Kosovo there should be no room for hatred and violence. Kosovo's institutions are committed to building a multi-ethnic democracy at peace with its neighbours and contributing to regional cooperation, peace and safety. The future of all nations of the Western Balkans is in European integration, and Kosovo intends to pursue this goal very vigorously. To achieve those goals, we in the Republic of Kosovo will continue close cooperation with the European Union, the United States and NATO.

In concluding, I would like to re-emphasize Kosovo's commitment toward working with all of the members of the Security Council to promote the shared goals of international peace and security. Once again, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to present the views of the Republic of Kosovo.

The President: I now give the floor to members of the Council.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): At the outset, I would like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, to today's meeting of the Security Council, and thank him for sharing his perspectives on the situation in Kosovo with us. I acknowledge the presence of Mr. Skender Hyseni at this meeting and thank him for his statement. I also thank Mr. Lamberto Zannier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his important briefing.

My delegation is encouraged by the relatively calm security situation in Kosovo during the reporting period. We welcome the continued, productive efforts by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to lend its good offices to all communities residing in the north of Kosovo and in northern Mitrovica with a view to promoting sustainable and peaceful solutions based on dialogue and compromise. We take note of the assumption of full operational capability by the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) in the rule of law sector, under the overall authority of the United Nations and within the status-neutral framework of resolution 1244 (1999). In this regard, we commend the regular exchange of information and coordination on issues of mutual concern between UNMIK and EULEX and hope that such interaction will continue.

However, in the light of a series of incidents that has occurred in northern Mitrovica, we remained concerned about the ongoing inter-ethnic violence in many parts of Kosovo and attempts to conclude UNMIK's mission without the green light of the Security Council. The continued presence of UNMIK with good faith cooperation from both Belgrade and Pristina and in close coordination with EULEX and the International Security Force in Kosovo (KFOR) is key to maintaining peace and stability on the ground.

We would like to reconfirm our view that the reconfiguration and downsizing of UNMIK should be conducted in a transparent manner and in respect for the United Nations position of strict neutrality regarding Kosovo's status and in ways that enable UNMIK to perform its functions, especially those that enhance the continuous mediation between communities and support minority communities throughout Kosovo.

We therefore call upon all parties concerned to fully and constructively cooperate with UNMIK in its areas of responsibility and strengthen confidence-building measures in order to achieve a comprehensive and long-term solution, taking into account the legitimate interests of all communities. We expect the Security Council and the Secretary-General to continue to play a vigorous and proactive role in this endeavour.

We are also mindful that the number of voluntary returns in 2009 remains disappointingly low and continues to lag behind the 2008 figures. It is our view that the lack of real progress in safeguarding the rights and ensuring the security of national minorities will only exacerbate the mistrust and lead to inter-ethnic tensions. In this context, we call upon all parties concerned to refrain from any rhetoric or action that may ignite violence. At the same time, we strongly urge UNMIK and EULEX to redouble their efforts to promote the establishment of a safe and stable environment conducive to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons throughout Kosovo.

Last but not least, we call for even greater efforts to minimize tensions in and around Kosovo and to reach negotiated solutions to differences through peaceful means.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to welcome the participation of Foreign Minister Hyseni of Kosovo. I am also pleased with the presence of Foreign Minister Jeremić of Serbia.

I would like to thank Special Representative Lamberto Zannier for his very comprehensive briefing this afternoon. We are very grateful to the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for their contributions to the gradual improvement of the situation in Kosovo. We particularly appreciate the Secretary-General's initiative of reconfiguring the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which is now approaching its final stage. The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) is now deployed throughout Kosovo and reached full operational capabilities in early April. We commend EULEX and other international

presences, such as the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, for the stabilization of Kosovo.

We appreciate Serbia's cooperation with the EULEX operation. We believe Serbia's commitment to the European integration process serves to promote the stability and prosperity of the entire West Balkan region, including Kosovo. Therefore, we expect Serbia to continue to further advance its integration into Europe, in cooperation with the international community.

Exactly one year has passed since the entry into force of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. During this period, Kosovo has made steady progress in its own nation-building by strengthening various State agencies. We hope that Kosovo will develop fully as a democratic, multi-ethnic country that will contribute to the stabilization of the West Balkan region.

It is gratifying that the number of countries that recognize Kosovo has been increasing gradually. Kosovo's recent accession to membership in international financial institutions — the International Monetary Fund in May and the World Bank this month — represents a significant opening for its future development within the global economy. We hope that Kosovo will continue to play a constructive role as a responsible member of the international economic community.

The situation on the ground is generally stable, but there are occasionally interethnic tensions in certain areas of Kosovo. I share the concern about the recent incident in Mitrovica. We wish to see more efforts made for the effective protection of minorities. I believe that UNMIK can play a useful role in the interethnic mediation and the dialogue on the six points, in close cooperation with other partners, including KFOR, EULEX and their member States.

Japan has actively supported Kosovo, through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, in its efforts towards peaceful coexistence and sustainable development as a multi-ethnic society, particularly in the northern part of the country.

Japan will continue to extend its strong support from a human security perspective to meet the needs of the people of Kosovo. We remain committed to helping Kosovo develop as a vibrant, multi-ethnic and democratic country.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to welcome the presence at this meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, and of Kosovo, Mr. Skender Hyseni. I also duly thank Mr. Lamberto Zannier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing.

It is with great relief, if not satisfaction, that we see calm prevailing in Kosovo, although some incidents have occurred in the northern part of the country with respect to land and the rebuilding of homes destroyed during the war. Fortunately, such incidents were contained thanks to the prompt intervention of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), in coordination with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), the Kosovo Force and the Kosovo Police, to protect those places and encourage both communities to find lasting peaceful solutions to their differences. It is in the interests of the authorities of Pristina and Belgrade to take all steps necessary to resolve such incidents peacefully. Moreover, we hope that the capacities provided by NATO to the Kosovo Security Force will soon make it operational, allowing it fully to shoulder its security responsibilities.

My delegation welcomes, inter alia, the constructive cooperation extended by the Kosovo authorities to UNMIK, despite some reticence concerning the latter's presence. One thing is clear. Even reconfigured, UNMIK, which enjoys the support of the Security Council and the entire international community, will always have a critical role to play in building security in Kosovo.

It goes without saying that the issue of the status of Kosovo remains the key bone of contention between the parties. However, Serbia's involvement in technical discussions on justice, the police and customs is an encouraging sign. We also welcome the significant progress made in addressing urgent cases before the Mitrovica courthouse and the normalization of the functioning of the legal system in northern Kosovo.

Similarly, progress has been seen in the area of restoring and protecting the Serbian cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo. We are also convinced that the emergence of opportunities for regional

cooperation in many areas, including the cultural, will allow the ultimate achievement of rapprochement and reconciliation.

One key factor in strengthening the reintegration process is clearly the revival of the economy, the creation of jobs and the improvement of the living conditions of the people of Kosovo. We emphasize and commend UNMIK's very important contribution in that regard. It follows that the entire international community must contribute its share of critical support in helping Kosovo to build a solid and viable economy.

We commend the effective assumption by EULEX of an operational role in the rule of law, the police, justice and customs, although we believe that UNMIK should continue to shoulder certain responsibilities in the field of justice. We also wish to thank UNMIK and all the regional and international partners for their support on the issue of missing persons.

Lastly, I wish to commend and encourage all the players working on the ground for the stability of Kosovo, and to express our desire to see all parties demonstrate the resolve and political vision necessary to pursuing a concerted approach that will ensure peace and stability throughout the region.

Mr. Parham (United Kingdom): I, too, would like to join other Security Council colleagues in welcoming the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lamberto Zannier; the Foreign Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Skender Hyseni; and the Foreign Minister of Serbia, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, to the Council Chamber today.

I would also like to express our thanks to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2009/300) on developments in Kosovo over the reporting period, and commend the ongoing and important work of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to promote stability and reconciliation in Kosovo. We would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lamberto Zannier, for his leadership and hard work.

The Secretary-General's report illustrates that, despite economic difficulties and continuing intercommunal tensions, Kosovo is making good progress. There is a growing number of United Nations Member States — now 60 — that recognize Kosovo, and that growing recognition was evident in the recent overwhelming support shown for Kosovo's membership of the international financial institutions. We would also like to recognize the first anniversary of the adoption of Kosovo's Constitution on 15 June.

We share the Secretary-General's concern about recent tensions over renewed house-building in Mitrovica. The response of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) was both effective and proportionate. We welcome the reconciliation work undertaken by the Kosovo Force and UNMIK, which helped to bring about a solution whereby both communities are now rebuilding their properties. The United Kingdom is committed to assisting the Kosovo Property Claims Commission in its work to restore rightful title to property for Kosovars of all communities, and we welcome the fact that displaced people continue to return to Kosovo, albeit at a low rate.

We welcome the good cooperation that exists between the United Nations and the European Union on Kosovo. The role of the EU continues to increase through EULEX, which achieved full operational capacity in April and is making important progress in strengthening the rule of law and re-establishing customs controls. It is right, therefore, that UNMIK should continue to draw down and to focus on those areas where it can play a useful and relevant role, such as supporting Kosovo's engagement with external organizations and promoting returns and reconciliation.

Given global economic difficulties, it is now more important than ever that United Nations missions should be no larger than strictly necessary. We note the view of the Secretary-General that the revised UNMIK budget meets in full the Mission's future mandate requirements. We also call on the Government of Kosovo to engage constructively with UNMIK in order to assist its work, which does not diminish Kosovo's status.

Promoting the rule of law, implementing the decentralization process and encouraging the participation of all Kosovo's citizens in local democratic processes remain key to building a better future for all in Kosovo. UNMIK, EULEX and other international partners must continue to cooperate closely to manage new challenges and achieve these objectives. Local and regional Governments must be prepared to work pragmatically with the

representatives of the international community. That will be particularly important to advance the decentralization process, and that is central to the creation of viable local government to engage with the organs of the State for the benefit of its communities, unlike the unrecognized parallel institutions.

The Kosovo Government must also reach out to all communities to demonstrate its commitment to implementing minority rights and must strive to achieve well-supported free and fair local elections. As the Secretary-General's report notes, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe can also play an important role in capacity-building to assist the elections.

Despite its position on Kosovo's status, the Government of Serbia should continue to engage with the European Union and to encourage the active participation of Kosovo's Serbian minority in the decentralization process. Kosovo's Serbs will benefit from the rule of law and the opportunity to play a part in running their own communities. To obtain those benefits, they will need to participate actively in the local elections and should be encouraged to do so.

The United Kingdom remains committed to supporting the efforts of the international community to promote stability, reconciliation and economic progress in Kosovo, progress that will enable it to advance towards an eventual European Union perspective, in parallel with its neighbours.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Kosovo, Mr. Zannier, for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) (S/2009/300). The Russian side has carefully analyzed that document.

We welcome the participation in today's Council meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Mr. Vuk Jeremić. We are grateful for the assessments he has provided, and we share them. We listened carefully to the statement by Mr. Hyseni, although one cannot call it a standard of objectivity.

We are concerned by the fact that despite all the signals from the Security Council to Pristina on the need to respect the Council's decisions, the representatives of the Kosovo authorities — and this was clearly referred to in the Secretary-General's report — in their public statements continue to demand that the United Nations Mission in Kosovo end its activities, due to the alleged irrelevance of Council resolution 1244 (1999) and their being under no legal obligations to implement it. We believe such behaviour is unacceptable.

Once again we would like to recall that resolution 1244 (1999) continues to remain fully in effect. In accordance with it, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Mission he heads in Kosovo should continue to carry out their functions, including assisting and ensuring the rights and security of ethnic minorities and achieving in the province democratic standards established by the international community. A great deal remains to be done in that regard.

Any independent steps circumventing the Security Council to substantially alter the geography of UNMIK's activities would unequivocally run counter to resolution 1244 (1999) and the package approach to reconfiguring UNMIK adopted by this Council in November 2008. I would recall that in accordance with that approach, any international presence in the province, including the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), must operate in a status-neutral framework while complying with the prerogatives of the United Nations and resolution 1244 (1999).

We note the positive role of UNMIK and the personal role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Zannier, in de-escalating tensions in the area of the town of Suchodol/Brdjani, on the outskirts of Kosovska Metrovica in April and May this year. We believe that responsibilities for what took place lie, above all, with the Kosovo Albanian side, who, despite the protests of the local Serbs, unilaterally began to work on restoring the houses of the Kosovo Albanian refugees.

Resolving such a complex and sensitive problem as refugee returns is something that the Kosovo Albanian authorities essentially turned into a political act. For the first time in the past ten years, the return of refugees would take place without the participation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, but with the support of international police and military forces. While recognizing the right of refugees to return to their homes, we are of the view that this process must be carried out on an equal

footing, taking into account the views of both the Albanian and Serb communities in the province.

We welcome the ongoing negotiations between Belgrade and the United Nations on involving representatives of EULEX on the six technical issues for ensuring the well-being of the Serbian community in the province. This dialogue clearly will be worthwhile, on the condition that a constructive position and good will be demonstrated not only by Belgrade but also by Pristina. So far, as we see in the Secretary-General's report, the Kosovo authorities demonstrate a reluctance to take part in this process.

We believe that it is necessary that the International Court of Justice consider, objectively and impartially, the submission of the General Assembly on whether the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence is consistent with international law. On 16 April Russia presented to the Court a written report reflecting Russia's fundamental position on this issue.

Taking into account that the General Assembly's Fifth Committee is currently discussing the UNMIK budget for 2009-2010, we hope that the resources that will ultimately be allocated to the Mission in Kosovo will prove sufficient for it to carry out its mandate and will take into account the desires of the Serbian side.

We are certain that there is no alternative to maintaining the Security Council's leading role in advancing the Kosovo process. The Council must continue to serve as the guarantor of compliance with international law, the United Nations Charter and the decisions of the Council itself.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo, Mr. Zannier, for his briefing. We appreciate the efforts he and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) have made in safeguarding peace and security in Kosovo and the Balkans region.

We listened carefully to the statement by His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Mr. Jeremić. We also listened carefully to Mr. Hyseni's statement.

Over the last three months the security situation in Kosovo has in general been calm, but tensions remain in some areas, particularly in northern Mitrovica, where a series of incidents occurred. China is concerned about these developments. At the same time, we are pleased to see that under UNMIK's mediation, Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs have reached initial settlements on issues that include construction of houses. We hope that all parties will continue to exercise restraint, enhance their dialogue and refrain from any rhetoric or actions that may jeopardize peace and stability.

We have taken note of the gradual increase in the number of voluntary returns of members of minority communities in 2009. However, the number still lags behind that of the same period in 2008. We appeal to UNMIK to intensify its mediation efforts to improve relations among ethnic communities. We urge parties concerned to continue to create and coordinate enabling conditions for voluntary returns of members of minority communities.

China believes that all parties must adhere to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council. They must also respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries, including Serbia. China has always maintained that the best way to resolve the issue of Kosovo is for the Serbian and Kosovar parties to arrive at a mutually acceptable settlement plan through negotiations.

The situation in Kosovo has undergone changes, but the basis for the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999) remains the same. China has taken note of the references in the report (S/2009/300) of the Secretary-General to the accelerated reconfiguration and drawdown of UNMIK to bring its functions in line with the new situation. We believe that the changes in UNMIK are of a technical nature. They must not involve the status of Kosovo or change the United Nations position of neutrality. The issue of Kosovo remains an important item on the Council's agenda. UNMIK must continue to maintain close communication with the parties concerned, as well as to play a key and constructive role in duly settling the issue of Kosovo.

We understand the desire of the European Union to play a role in safeguarding peace and stability in the Balkan region. We note that the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) has pledged to abide by resolution 1244 (1999) and that it recently submitted another report on its activities. We hope that EULEX will continue to operate under the overall

authority of the United Nations and within the status-neutral framework of resolution 1244 (1999), support the work of UNMIK and play an active role in safeguarding peace and stability in the region.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to welcome Mr. Vuk Jeremić, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, as well as Mr. Skender Hyseni. I would also like to welcome Mr. Lamberto Zannier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and to thank him and the others for their briefings.

Despite some isolated incidents and the differences in the positions of Albanian and Serbian Kosovars, we are pleased with the overall stability in the security situation in Kosovo. We pay tribute to the role of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). We also commend the coordination and cooperation between UNMIK and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX).

The report (S/2009/300) of the Secretary-General includes a number of positive elements that can be built upon to normalize the situation between communities and achieve lasting stability of Kosovo, beginning with the rebuilding of homes in the northern part of Kosovo following an agreement between Albanian and Serb citizens. Some progress has also been made in the search for solutions to protect Serbian heritage in Kosovo, and 26 bodies have been identified and returned to their families.

We also note with satisfaction the efforts of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to help returnees and reconstruct homes, including its promise to rebuild 45 residential units by the end of the year as part of the UNDP-managed Sustainable Partnerships for Assistance to Returns in Kosovo. We would also like to commend UNMIK's support for the reconstruction of cultural and religious heritage sites damaged in the wake of the violence in 2004.

Despite the peaceful and positive developments taking place in Kosovo, we continue to be concerned that areas in the North still operate independently from the rest of Kosovo. We are also concerned about the ongoing divisions between the northern and other police forces in Kosovo. In that regard, we believe it important to encourage all citizens to take part in local police and administration.

UNMIK's establishment of the Office for Community Support and Facilitation is an important step that we should all support. It is also important for UNMIK to focus on minority affairs, including by supporting the return process, monitoring human rights and continuing to mediate among local communities.

We stress the need to increase the effectiveness of the Human Rights Advisory Panel as a credible instrument to address claims pertaining to violations of human rights in the framework of UNMIK.

We hope that all parties will continue to cooperate with EULEX in coordination with UNMIK, pursuant to presidential statement S/PRST/2008/44 of 26 November 2008. We also hope that dialogue will continue between Pristina and Belgrade to enforce the ad hoc arrangement on the six common points set out by the Secretary-General in his letter to the President of Serbia dated 12 June 2008.

In conclusion, we call upon all parties to make further efforts to keep the channels of constructive cooperation open with a view to promoting peaceful coexistence and harmony among all parties and communities and avoiding confrontation and violence. We would also like to emphasize the need for all refugees to return home and to protect all internally displaced persons and cultural and religious sites. The issue of missing persons should not be politicized. There must be common ground if peace and stability in Kosovo and the Balkans are to be maintained.

Ms. DiCarlo (United States of America): I, too, would like to welcome to the Council today Mr. Skender Hyseni, Foreign Minister of Kosovo, and Mr. Vuk Jeremić, Foreign Minister of Serbia. I thank them for their comments. I would also like to thank Special Representative Zannier for his comprehensive briefing and for his excellent leadership of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

The democratic and multi-ethnic institutions of the Republic of Kosovo have continued to mature since Kosovo's declaration of independence last year. We welcome the increase in cooperation on practical matters among Kosovo's communities, as cited by the Special Representative. We note the recent appointment of an ombudsman to ensure that Government institutions are held accountable to the public and to guard against any abuse of authority. The appointment by the President of Kosovo of a

constitutional court that includes minority representatives is another important development, as is the selection of new members of Kosovo's Central Elections Commission in preparation for Kosovo's upcoming municipal elections. Those will be the first elections run by Kosovo since its independence. The United States offers our support to Kosovo's efforts to ensure that they are democratic and transparent.

We also take note of the recent election of Kosovo to the International Monetary Fund. We await the results of the vote on Kosovo's bid to join the World Bank. Membership in those international financial institutions will help Kosovo to provide economic stability and prosperity for all its citizens and help to integrate Kosovo's economy into the global financial system. All of these developments in Kosovo are consistent with the vision of the Ahtisaari Plan. We note that 60 States Members of the United Nations have recognized Kosovo as an independent and sovereign State.

I would like to address the issue of the Kosovo Serbs. We encourage the Government of Kosovo to continue its efforts to reach out to the Serb and other minority communities. It is positive news that the rate of returns has at long last begun to increase, but returns remain at an unacceptably low level. The Secretary-General documents 660 minority families, comprised of 3,100 individuals, who have expressed interest in returning home to Kosovo in 2009. We look forward to realizing that potential this year, and in this regard, we welcome Prime Minister Thaci's restatement of Kosovo's commitment to returns.

For Kosovo to become a truly multi-ethnic society, Belgrade's cooperation is essential. We welcome the commitment of Belgrade authorities to cooperating with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), which is now fully deployed throughout Kosovo. We appreciate the firm response of EULEX and the Kosovo Force to the recent violence over the reconstruction of ethnic Albanian homes in northern Kosovo, a response that helps support freedom of movement, safety and security for all, regardless of ethnicity.

We encourage Belgrade to support the integration of Kosovo Serb communities into Kosovo's institutions, in particular to create conditions for Kosovo Serbs to return to their positions in the Kosovo Police, and to support other pragmatic solutions that will improve the communities' welfare.

Unfortunately, the Government of Serbia continues to block goods from Kosovo, even though UNMIK has certified twice now that Kosovo's new customs stamp complies with resolution 1244 (1999). We encourage Serbia to support intraregional trade, in keeping with its Central European Free Trade Agreement commitments.

The United States fully supports the reconfiguration and downsizing of UNMIK, as outlined in recent reports of the Secretary-General and as reflected in the Secretary-General's current budget proposal. In the light of the positive developments in Kosovo, we believe that the Secretary-General should continue to downsize the UNMIK presence to functions that the Government of Kosovo or international organizations cannot perform, such as facilitating Kosovo's participation in regional organizations such as the Regional Cooperation Council and the Central European Free Trade Agreement. Kosovo's participation in these forums promotes regional cooperation and growth, and is in the entire region's interest.

The stability of the western Balkans remains a high priority for the United States. We strongly support the region's integration into European institutions and its full participation in the Euro-Atlantic community. Kosovo and other Balkan countries still face many challenges, and the United States will continue to support their progress and development.

Mr. Vilović (Croatia): I, too, would like to welcome the Foreign Minister of Serbia, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, and the Foreign Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Skender Hyseni, to the Chamber and to thank them for their statements. We also welcome Special Representative of the Secretary-General Lamberto Zannier and thank him for his comments and his tireless work.

Croatia welcomes the continued and steady progress that Kosovo is making along its path of creating a stable, secure and democratic society while simultaneously strengthening both its economic and its development capacities. Notwithstanding some minor incidents, Croatia welcomes the Secretary-General's assessment that the overall security situation in Kosovo is stable.

Croatia would like to commend the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) for — as stated by the Secretary-General — the effective and useful role it plays in mediating between communities and promoting practical arrangements that can benefit both Pristina and Belgrade. We believe that this fact in itself confirms the indispensable role that UNMIK plays in Kosovo, particularly on issues of external relations and international legal assistance, and we would call on all parties to continue to cooperate with Special Representative Zannier and his team in an effective and efficient manner.

Croatia welcomes the full deployment on 6 April of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, to which Croatia contributes, and would like to take this opportunity to commend its leadership and other contributing countries for their efforts.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the efforts made on the question of the reconstruction of cultural property and the issue of returns. Further progress in this field remains a question of critical importance. We look forward to common success in the development of a vibrant, pluralistic and democratic society in Kosovo, strengthened by its commitment to the values of peace, tolerance, human and minority rights, dialogue and cooperation.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): I would like to welcome Mr. Vuk Jeremić, Foreign Minister of Serbia, and thank him for his statement. I would equally like to welcome Mr. Skender Hyseni, Foreign Minister of Kosovo, and thank him for his statement. Moreover, allow me to express our deep appreciation for the work of Mr. Lamberto Zannier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and for the important contribution he is making on a daily basis to facilitating dialogue between all sides.

We note with satisfaction that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has successfully finalized its reconfiguration and downsizing, as foreseen in the report of the Secretary-General before us today (S/2009/300). We are convinced that the new structure and strength of the Mission will enable UNMIK to perform the functions identified in the Secretary-General's reports of June and November 2008 (S/2008/354 and S/2008/692). We particularly welcome the Mission's focus on mediation between the communities and on support to minority communities.

Allow me to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outstanding performance of the personnel who have served in UNMIK over the past 10 years.

We are particularly satisfied that the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) assumed its full operational capability on 6 April, allowing the Mission to effectively perform its tasks of monitoring, advising and mentoring the police, customs and judiciary of Kosovo, as well as ensuring effective responses to instances of inter-ethnic violence or major public disturbances.

The European Union will, as it does for the rest of Kosovo, implement its mandate in northern Kosovo in the interests of all communities and will, in that context, ensure an adequate presence. Austria is currently providing 26 experts, above all in the fields of police and the judiciary, to EULEX. Furthermore, we will also continue to contribute to the Kosovo Force (KFOR) with approximately 600 troops. We support the decision by NATO, taken after consultation with non-NATO troop-contributors to KFOR, including Austria, to commence preparations for the transition of KFOR to a determined presence, which also foresees a reduction in troop numbers in several phases.

For our part, we will maintain, as I have said, our level more or less at the present level of contribution, which will continue to make us the biggest non-NATO contributor to KFOR. We see the step taken by NATO as recognition of the progress achieved in the stabilization of Kosovo and as closely linked to the increasing capabilities of EULEX.

In the light of the downsizing of UNMIK, we appreciate the valuable role that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) continues to play in Kosovo in areas where UNMIK has concluded its work or has greatly reduced its activities. The extensive civilian field presence of the OSCE throughout all parts of Kosovo is unparalleled and brings unique continuity and balance to its grassroots monitoring and capacity-building efforts. The early warning mechanism that this monitoring provides is highly valued, in particular at the municipal level. The local elections foreseen for 15 November will also highlight the indispensable support the OSCE has maintained for nearly a decade to the developing democratic institutions of Kosovo.

As we have just heard, there have been several positive developments over the reporting period. We particularly welcome progress in the ongoing decentralizing process in Kosovo, which will be key to addressing minority protection and to strengthening local governance throughout the country. Successful implementation clearly benefiting the minority population, above all the Kosovo Serb community, will, however, depend on their participation in this process and, in particular, in the upcoming local elections.

We are confident that with the necessary pragmatism, solutions to contentious matters can be found, thus taking Kosovo closer to the objective of a multi-ethnic and peaceful society. Despite relative stability in the past months, tensions and incidents of violence, as in northern Mitrovica over the reconstruction of houses by Kosovo Albanian returnees, continue to have a destabilizing potential. While we appreciate the well-coordinated reaction of UNMIK, EULEX and KFOR, we want to reiterate that lasting and peaceful solutions can only be found if all communities engage directly both with each other and with the international presences.

We share the Secretary-General's observation that the efforts of all sides, with the support of the international community, need to continue to further implement the practical arrangements laid out in his report, issued in November last year (S/2008/692). We welcome the increased contribution of EULEX in discussions in the area of the rule of law. Impasses in the fields of police, justice, property rights and customs continue to hinder the normalization of daily life, with negative impacts for both Kosovo and Serbia. We therefore encourage both Pristina and Belgrade to bridge their differences and reach a productive working relationship. Recent reports warn that, owing to political, social and economic discrimination against smaller minorities who have inhabited Kosovo for centuries, many of their members may be forced to leave the country, which give us cause for concern.

We hope that the Kosovo authorities, with the help of the international presence, will increase efforts to translate their commitments regarding a tolerant and multi-ethnic society into effective action so as to facilitate the active participation of all minorities, including the smaller ones, as I said, in all aspects of public life. Particular attention should be paid to the practical application of international human rights law with regard to the entire territory and population. Equally, we expect the Belgrade authorities to use their influence in order to ensure a more positive approach in that regard by the Kosovo Serbs.

While deploring the fact that the overall number of voluntary minority returns remains disappointingly low, we are encouraged by news of the recent gradual increase in numbers. We express our hope that Kosovo's project for returns will prove to be effective in creating conditions conducive to the reintegration of minority communities.

Austria, as is well known, has consistently supported a future for all peoples of the Western Balkans within the European Union. In particular, we hope that Serbia can rapidly advance on its path towards European integration, and Belgrade knows that it can count on the support of the Austrian Government in that matter.

At the same time, we very much appreciate the clear commitment by the Government of Kosovo to the European future and the European perspective of its country. We are convinced that that shared vision will clearly benefit all citizens of Serbia and Kosovo and will help them to look ahead to overcome existing differences and allow for the necessary progress.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Mr. Lamberto Zannier, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for the information that he has shared with us today and Mr. Vuk Jeremić, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, for his presence and statement. We also thank Mr. Skender Hyseni for his statement.

We have followed closely the process of reconfiguration of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the full deployment on the ground of the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX). The cooperation achieved between UNMIK and EULEX in the areas of justice, the rule of law and customs shows that there is cooperation between the United Nations and the European Union in promoting regional peace and stability.

For my delegation, it is particularly important that the parties cooperate fully with UNMIK in fulfilling its mandate in accordance with resolution 1244 (1999), respecting the criteria of neutrality. The obligation to fulfil the provisions of that resolution

embodies the legal basis for attaining a lasting and peaceful solution to the Kosovo situation and, in general, for the stability of the Balkans.

We are concerned that, while the situation in Kosovo has remained relatively stable, continuing incidents of tension between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians in the past months demonstrate the fragility of the regional stability and the need to encourage inter-community dialogue and confidence-building measures between the parties.

We believe it necessary to strengthen cooperation between UNMIK and EULEX in order to agree on measures to peacefully prevent and contain the possible outbreak of inter-ethnic violence, particularly in north Kosovo. Similarly, UNMIK needs to cooperate more closely with the parties and with EULEX, so as to promote concrete steps to achieve the participation of Kosovo Serbs in the Kosovo Police, since that is one of the issues contributing to tension in the region.

For my delegation, strengthening the rule of law is of the greatest importance in the current situation. We encourage UNMIK and EULEX to continue to seek ways to work together, particularly with regard to the legal assistance to the local authorities. Likewise, we call on the parties and UNMIK to support and fully cooperate with the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in order to ensure due process for the cases under its jurisdiction.

One very important issue in conflict prevention is the reintegration of minorities, in particular the Kosovo Serbs. However, the reality does not always help that reintegration, which is why it is essential to promote a strategic association among the United Nations development agencies and programmes, the donor community, regional organizations and the Government of Serbia in order to undertake specific measures to promote lasting socio-economic development in the region to provide conditions for people's well-being, including opportunities for employment, access to public services and security, while, at the same time, encouraging the voluntary return of the refugees and internally displaced persons.

In that regard, we welcome the fact that projects for the return of Kosovo Serbian families and the rebuilding of their homes are being implemented with the help of the United Nations Development Programme.

We believe that inter-ethnic relations are one of the most pressing challenges that Kosovo is facing. UNMIK presence is vital to guarantee the protection of the human, property and housing rights of the minorities.

In that respect, it is important that, in the reconfiguration of UNMIK, particular attention be paid to strengthening the Mission component on human rights assistance in order to increase the efficient consideration of alleged human rights violations in the region, and that the parties work closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the parties so as to outline a comprehensive strategy for strengthening the protection of human rights in the region.

Finally, my delegation reiterates its position as a steadfast and consistent promoter of the principles of justice and international law, enshrined in the Charters of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, which is the top jurisdictional body for peacefully solving disputes arising from the interpretation of international law. In that context, we eagerly await the advisory opinion of the Court on the case of Kosovo requested by the General Assembly.

Mr. Mugoya (Uganda): We too welcome Mr. Vuk Jeremić, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, and thank him for his briefing. We also thank Mr. Lamberto Zannier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Skender Hyseni for their briefings.

We welcome the new developments in the region regarding the reconfiguration and downsizing of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) within the status-neutral framework of resolution 1244 (1999). Given the challenges in inter-ethnic relations still being faced by Kosovo, the structure and strength of the reconfigured Mission for the 2009 to 2010 period will ensure that the Mission is better resourced for continuous mediation between the communities and for increased support to minority communities throughout Kosovo.

We are encouraged by the level of cooperation between UNMIK and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) regarding exchange of information and coordination on issues of major concern, and we propose that such cooperation in all sectors should continue to be strengthened. We are also pleased to note that EULEX has reached full operational capacity and that it is continuing to operate

under the overall authority of the United Nations and within the status-neutral framework of resolution 1244 (1999).

We acknowledge the increased expertise and professional role of EULEX in the areas of police, justice and customs and commend its contribution in the area of the rule of law. There is need to ensure proper functioning of the Central European Free Trade Agreement mechanisms aimed at promoting economic growth and development in the region. In that regard, we call upon the authorities in Kosovo and Serbia to resolve any outstanding issues regarding customs.

Although it appears that the overall security situation in Kosovo during the reporting period remained relatively calm, we are particularly concerned by the series of inter-ethnic incidents of violence that occurred in the northern Mitrovica suburbs. We call upon both parties to exercise restraint, mutual respect and tolerance in order to harmoniously live together in the interest of peace. We salute the efforts of UNMIK in coordination with EULEX and the Kosovo Force that encouraged both sides to find a sustainable and peaceful solution. We also commend UNMIK for its continued mediation that eventually broke the deadlock and brought the two sides together to agree on a pragmatic solution.

Furthermore, we welcome the important contribution that UNMIK, together with EULEX and the International Committee of the Red Cross, is making in the Working Group on Missing Persons, and we call upon all concerned to offer continued support.

Finally, we commend UNMIK for its work and urge the international community to continue to lend the necessary support to enable it to acceptably execute its role of maintaining peace and stability on the ground.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to begin by thanking Mr. Lamberto Zannier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his presence and his briefing. I also welcome Minister Jeremić and Minister Hyseni and thank them for their statements.

Costa Rica acknowledges the report of the Secretary-General (S/2009/300). It contains important recommendations on the functions that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) should continue to fulfil in its role as mediator between the parties and in promoting rules to benefit both communities. That was also made clear in the reports of June and November 2008 (S/2008/354 and S/2008/692). We urge the authorities of Pristina to continue working with the United Nations.

Costa Rica recognizes the efforts of UNMIK and the deployment of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) as positive measures to strengthen political stability and the implementation and consolidation of the rule of law to intervene to protect and ensure respect for human rights, and to preserve the rich cultural and religious heritage of Kosovo.

In fully supporting the role of the United Nations in promoting the political momentum in Kosovo, my delegation also commends the cooperation between the United Nations and other regional bodies. We welcome the efforts of the European Union to advance the European dimension in the entire Balkan region and support the efforts to reconfigure UNMIK and strengthen the functions of EULEX, in particular in the consolidation of the rule of law. However, Costa Rica is also aware of the need to adopt preventive measures and provide the necessary guarantees to ensure that the process will contribute to lasting regional peace and political stability.

Costa Rica reiterates its conviction that the civilian international presence should oversee the transfer of authority from the provisional to the permanent institutions of Government. My country supports the efforts of the Kosovar State, which we have recognized. We welcome steps to normalize political, legal and economic relations that will gradually promote Kosovo's emergence as a State on the international stage living in peaceful coexistence with its neighbours.

In that regard, we urge all parties to cooperate in implementing practical measures to overcome the isolation of specific groups caused by ethnic tensions or other reasons. As it executes its mandate, the European Union should ensure equal rights for all the communities of Kosovo, a process in which the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has an important role to play in the protection of minorities, in particular the Serbs of Kosovo.

Above and beyond the complex international financial crisis, Kosovo is facing important challenges. It must strengthen its young institutions, practise even-

handedness, moderation and integrity in the application of the rule of law, in particular -- as I said before — with regard to protecting minority. It must establish the necessary equilibrium with its neighbours and move towards the future with the continuing support of Europe in order to ensure its sustainability as a State. The European Union, with its presence in the region and its political vision, should contribute to ensuring common security and work to ensure commitment to and acceptance of the new political realities on the part of all players with direct interests in the region.

Costa Rica urges the European Union and other international organizations to continue to support the socio-economic development of Kosovo in order to facilitate its national consolidation, regional integration and full participation in the concert of nations.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Vuk Jeremić, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia and Mr. Skender Hyseni, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, for their presence.

I also wish to thank Mr. Lamberto Zannier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his statement and for the work that he and his team are doing. We appreciate his work as the head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), in cooperation with the other international presences, first and foremost, of course, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX).

A year ago almost to the day, Kosovo adopted its Constitution. At that time, we called on the Kosovo authorities to rapidly implement all the provisions of the Constitution, which is exemplary in its adherence to European standards and values. The new authorities in Kosovo have honoured their commitments, in particular by adopting several laws essential to strengthening the rule of law and to the participation of minorities. In particular, the Government's strong commitment to decentralization is a key decision in favour of the progressive building of a multi-ethnic Kosovo. The protection of the rights of minorities is a priority for the European Union, which will ensure the fulfilment of the commitments undertaken by the authorities in that area.

Despite some outbreaks of violence fanned by extremist elements often linked to criminal groups, the security situation in Kosovo has been remarkably stable in recent months. The population and all communities have thereby indicated their firm dedication to peace and stability.

Internationally, 60 States now recognize Kosovo. We also welcome Kosovo's accession to membership of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, a move that is essential to the economic development of the country. Such developments will contribute to the emergence of a new State on the international stage and to stability throughout the Balkans.

The deployment of EULEX was completed on 6 April. As it has progressed, the inhabitants of Kosovo have come to see that, despite the negative propaganda spread by certain extremist groups, the European Mission is acting for the benefit of the entire population and all communities.

Pursuant to the reconfiguration of the international presence decided by the Secretary-General and endorsed by the Security Council in its presidential statement of 26 November 2008 (S/PRST/2008/44), EULEX is now responsible for all operational tasks in the rule of law sector that previously fell to UNMIK. The reconfiguration is in no way synonymous with a reduction of the international presence in Kosovo. On the contrary, it represents a robust step and testimony to the ongoing commitment of the international community.

As it does for all United Nations missions, the Security Council will have to consider the evolution of UNMIK's mandate. In that respect, we believe that the proposals made by Mr. Zannier and by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2009/300) are quite appropriate.

Acting within the framework of resolution 1244 (1999) and under the overall authority of the United Nations, EULEX works in coordination with the other components of the international presence, in particular UNMIK, which continues to play a useful role. I wish to recall the importance that France attaches to the due cooperation of the Kosovo authorities with the United Nations.

The European Union, for its part, has followed the dialogue launched by the Secretary-General with all parties concerned on the reconfiguration of the international presence. The dialogue is key to stability in the region. We are well aware of the difficulties involved. The profound differences between the Serb

and Kosovar authorities will not be settled overnight, but that should not prevent us from seeking together, through dialogue, practical solutions to the concrete problems that affect the lives of all the Kosovo communities.

We listened carefully to the statements made by Mr. Jeremić and Mr. Hyseni. We were pleased to note that, despite their ongoing differences, they have a shared interest in preserving the conditions for a common future within Europe. We therefore encourage Belgrade and Pristina to renew direct dialogue as soon as possible.

France particularly wishes to tell Mr. Jeremić that, in supporting the European initiatives to contribute to stability in the region, he will help to establish conditions for a common future for the West Balkans. That was the message that French President Sarkozy conveyed to President Tadić during the latter's recent visit to Paris. At the same time, at a recent meeting of its General Affairs and External Relations Council, the European Union took another step forward by deciding to accelerate the process of visa liberalization for all the Balkan countries.

To Mr. Hyseni, we naturally wish to reiterate the support expressed by our President for Prime Minister Thaci during his visit to Paris, and to convey to him that it is through tangible progress towards a state of law and respect for neighbouring minorities and through an effort to forge bonds of friendship with Kosovo's neighbours that his country will advance down the road to European integration.

The European Union is fully cognizant of its responsibilities for overcoming obstacles to a stable and prosperous future for the West Balkans. In that spirit, we will strive in the months to come to proceed towards a common future for Serbs and Kosovars in the framework of the European Union.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Turkey.

I should like to extend a warm welcome to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Mr. Vuk Jeremić and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, Mr. Skender Hyseni.

I would also like to thank Mr. Zannier for his briefing. We appreciate his efforts. We would also like to acknowledge and express our appreciation for the past and current role of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in ensuring peace and stability in Kosovo. Of course, the same goes for the Kosovo Force.

Sixty countries have recognized Kosovo. Turkey was one of the first to do so. This figure also lends clear legitimacy to the declaration of independence of Kosovo. We are pleased to see that the overall situation in Kosovo is stable and that the Kosovo authorities are taking the necessary steps to consolidate their State institutions and system. This is a process that we fully support and to which we remain ready to further contribute in any way we can.

In that line, we support the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to reconfigure UNMIK. In this regard, we are pleased to see that the process is going smoothly and that we are close to finalization. At the same time, we believe that UNMIK still has an important role to play in Kosovo, especially in helping to facilitate the resolution of a number of practical but serious problems.

We are also pleased to see that there is a good working relationship and cooperation between UNMIK and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). We encourage both Serbia and Kosovo to cooperate with UNMIK and EULEX.

We attach great importance to security and stability in the Balkans and see the independence of Kosovo in the framework of lasting peace, stability and prosperity in the entire region. That being the case, the support given to Kosovo in its efforts to integrate into the international community and institutions should be further intensified. We will do our part in that regard.

We must also underline that a democratic and prosperous Serbia at peace with its neighbours is crucial to regional stability and cooperation. The international community should continue to encourage and support Serbia in its efforts to integrate into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. As for Turkey, we are determined to carry forward our friendly and mutually beneficial relations with Serbia.

Being very much a part of the Balkans, we are committed to working with all our partners towards ensuring a safe, stable and prosperous future for the region.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

Mr. Skender Hyseni has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Hyseni: Cognizant of the Security Council's time, I wish nevertheless to respond to a number of points made by Mr. Jeremić in an evident effort to mislead the Council, especially when he tried to tell the Council that the independence of Kosovo was declared by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government — that is, by Albanians alone.

I wish to inform the members of the Council that the independence of the Republic of Kosovo was declared by elected representatives of the people of Kosovo, including by all elected representatives of non-Albanian communities except the members of the Serb community. All the representatives of the Bosnian, Turkish, Egyptian, Roma and other communities voted in favour of Kosovo's independence.

With respect to the returnees, I wish to inform the Council that the Government of the Republic of Kosovo is vitally committed to and interested in returning to their homes every single displaced person and every single refugee — I emphasize, every single one. We stand ready to provide, at whatever cost, conditions for returning every single citizen of ours.

However, I have to point out that the kind of game that is being played with figures is not helpful. Two hundred thousand Kosovo Serbs, said Minister Jeremić, are still displaced. I have to repeat yet again that according to the last census — which was conducted by the Serbian-imposed authority in Kosovo — the largest number of Serbs ever living in Kosovo was 195,000. Presently, in Kosovo 135,000 Serbs live. I do not know where that 200,000 figure is found.

I wish to again inform the Council that the Republic of Serbia — the Government in Belgrade — is not helping the returns. The Government in Belgrade is encouraging the refugees from Kosovo in Serbia not to return so that the Government in Belgrade could have an alibi to tell to respectable forums such as this one that Kosovars are not doing what they should be doing.

We have no reason whatsoever to fear the returnees — quite the opposite. As I said earlier, my President, Prime Minister, all members of the Government and ministers are doing their utmost to make sure that all the conditions are there. Ultimately, it is impossible to force — and we do not want to force — any single individual to do what he or she is not willing to do.

Kosovo is an independent country, and Kosovo will never again seek authorization from Belgrade to do anything whatsoever. That should be clear once and for all. But that should not prevent us from working together. We are willing to work with Belgrade to improve the situation of our Kosovo Serbs, if that is what it takes to have our Kosovo Serbs work with us, because we are willing to deliver on our commitments to improve their lives. We are not willing to make use of unfortunate destinies of individuals in the Serb community for any sort of political sport, because we do not need that.

Again, we have an unspeakable game with figures, close to science fiction — 40,000 claims. The Kosovo Property Agency is going to consider carefully every single claim. Property will be restored to every single citizen, whether Serb or Albanian, or whatever ethnic background. But I have to just invite the Council's attention to the damage that this kind of game with figures may cause, great damage.

Kosovo is a single customs entity and is going to remain as such. Kosovo is also a single judicial entity. Regarding the South-East European Cooperation Process, the Regional Cooperation Council and other regional mechanisms, Kosovo is very much interested in being part of those initiatives. Kosovo is insisting firmly on being part of regional efforts to fight organized crime and cross-border criminal activity and to be part of every single other regional initiative that would benefit the peoples and States all over the region.

The Kosovo Security Force is not an illegal paramilitary institution. It was established on the basis of recommendations of a Nobel Peace Prize winner, Marti Ahtisaari. I do not think a Nobel Peace Prize winner would ever suggest the establishment of an illegal paramilitary criminal force. I tell Mr. Jeremić that he should never fear the Kosovo Security Force. What he should fear is the still-too-many supporters of Milosević in the military and police structures in Serbia. That is what Mr. Jeremić should fear, not the Kosovo Security Force.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić to make a further statement.

Mr. Jeremić (Serbia): I really want to direct the attention of the Council briefly to the source of the figures that were mentioned in the intervention of Serbia: 206,000 is the official number of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It is really unbelievable that here in this building somebody is doubting the official numbers of the UNHCR. That is the number of this Organization when it comes to the number of Serb internally displaced persons; it is not the number of the Serbian Government.

As to the 40,000 unresolved claims for illegally seized property, that is the official number of the Kosovo Property Agency during the time it operated under UNMIK. The 40,000 claims are waiting to be processed; the people have not heard back. These numbers are quoted by international sources.

We do really want to find ways of working together. It is not Serbia that fears this Kosovo Security Force; it cannot fear the Kosovo Security Force. It is the citizens of Serbia who live in the province who fear the Kosovo Security Force; that is their position. So I believe we need to do more to try to rebuild the trust of those people who have been living under those conditions since 1999. The reason why the do not trust any Pristina institutions, and why they are not taking any steps towards working with them, probably has to do with the way they have been treated in the past ten years.

We do want to help everybody. We want to fight organized crime. I think that regional efforts should be made to fight organized crime, first and foremost in the province of Kosovo. I am really not breaking any news to anybody here in the Council when I say that Kosovo is the hub of organized crime, not just for the Western Balkans but for all of Europe. There is a lot of work to be done there in order to combat organized crime. Serbia wants to work with the international community in order to curb organized crime in the province.

Having said all that, I want to emphasize our intention to work constructively together with everybody in order to find solutions to practical problems on the ground, for the sake of the citizens of the province. We stand behind these remarks and look forward to a more hopeful future — a future in which all United Nations Member States of the Western Balkans become member States of the European Union.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.